

# Frankfurt emerges as German dope capital

by Volker Hassmann

A series of bloody shootouts between rival gangs in Frankfurt-on-Main have confirmed recent warnings by Chancellor Helmut Kohl against the growing power of organized crime in Germany. In the last cabinet meeting before the summer recess on July 24, Kohl reacted to a dramatic escalation of the drug problem in the country, which saw a record death toll among drug addicts in the first half of 1991. In the east German states, a full-fledged drug trade network is being established and a large amount of laundered drug money is flowing eastward in the form of regular "investments." Kohl cited a study by Interpol that counts an annual turnover of \$500 billion in the global narcotics trade.

Kohl called the drug cartels "a challenge to the state and society," and said that the dimensions of the world dope trade are such that extraordinary measures, such as a ban on money-laundering and new options for drug enforcement, had to be considered.

Kohl voiced concern about the recent, massive inflow of dope from areas east of the German-Polish border, and pointed out that synthetic drugs are produced in large quantities in Poland, natural drugs in the Soviet Union.

## Gang warfare

In recent years, Frankfurt has become the nation's capital of crime. Drugs, prostitution, illegal gambling, money laundering—all are organized within a tight, mafia-style structure, headed by mobsters and real estate czars linked to international organized crime. Now, a violent gang warfare has erupted. On July 18, shots were fired from a passing car into a group of Yugoslav gamblers playing the "shell game" in front of a bar in the red light district, leaving two dead and four injured. Ten days later, there was a shoot-out between a Turkish drug dealer and Yugoslav gangsters. On July 22, a drug dealer opened fire against a police officer during a routine check; two bullets hit the head of the officer, who has been in a coma ever since.

According to the city's Attorney General, this is only the tip of the iceberg. The power struggle among the gangs is escalating, with shootings every two or three days—four in the last week of July. The Yugoslav gangs are only the foot soldiers of the Frankfurt mafia. There are seven to ten groups running the "shell game," which yields up to DM 20,000

(\$11,000) daily for one team. The police speak of about half a million deutschemarks daily in cash income invested in the drug trade. The Yugoslav gangs get a fixed salary, while the cash flow is taken by the local drug barons. Illegal gambling in Frankfurt yields an annual turnover of DM 300 million (\$1.7 million), with the gigantic profit from the heroin, cocaine, and arms trade not included.

Yugoslavs have taken over the heroin business, which they run for the city's mafia, sometimes called the "Israeli" mafia. This is run by the Beker brothers, who have run the red light district since the mid-sixties. The Bekers later moved into real estate speculation and, together with real estate czar "Joschi" Buchmann, are involved in various corrupt deals with local politicians. Buchmann, with connections to the organized crime networks of the late Meyer Lansky networks, is believed to be the "godfather" of organized crime in Frankfurt.

## Liberal city fathers do nothing

The gang warfare has alarmed the public, while the liberals are playing down the problem. Social Democratic Mayor Andreas von Schoeler, a passionate advocate of the decriminalization of drugs since his days in the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), did not even mention organized crime in his inaugural speech in May, and denies that Frankfurt is a "crime capital." Not only has he, with the Social Democrats, prevented the closing of the red light district; he now wants to open a "tolerance zone" for prostitution in the northern part of the railroad station district. Under heavy pressure, he finally ordered a "review" of the permits of bars and brothels, and agreed to force them to close at 2 a.m. instead of 4 a.m., calling this a "decisive blow" against crime.

The liberals in the FDP on the national level have sabotaged the federal bill against organized crime so effectively, that Frankfurt police spokesmen have criticized it sharply. The chief of police regretted "unrealistic concepts" which are not sufficient "if we really are to fight organized crime." Except for the fact that organized crime is finally realized as a major challenge, there is not much to the bill. The penetration of the mafia by undercover agents is seriously hampered, as these agents are not allowed to place wiretaps on apartments (where all deals are negotiated) and have no effective protection of their identity if they are called to court as witnesses. "The drug barons can be happy," editorialized the daily *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, warning "that within years, far more drastic measures than discussed today, will have to be taken against organized crime. But then it will be too late."

No matter what Schoeler says, Frankfurt is losing its reputation, causing alarm among industry and local politicians. An internal study by an economic newsletter has called it "the German Chicago." In the debate over the future seat of the planned European Central Bank, Frankfurt is now rated fourth, behind Luxembourg, Brussels, and London.